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ABSTRACT

The rediscovery of qualitative research in education in the 1970s has fanned the debate among proponents of both qualitative and quantitative traditions. This paper demonstrates implications of each research tradition for educational policymaking. Grounded in finding solutions to practical problems, educational research has had two purposes: to develop understanding and to allow for prediction and control. The qualitative approach is especially suited for describing and explaining social phenomena, whereas quantitative research emphasizes prediction and control. This paper treats social control mechanisms as employing either authority or power relationships. Using Mitchell and Spady's concept, one might conclude that qualitative researchers approach social phenomena from an authority (or authentic) perspective and form conclusions based on individuals' interactions in social situations. Quantitative researchers, on the other hand, take a power orientation toward subjects and base conclusions on power notions of social control. Since schools are human transformational organizations, they are ill served by a quantitative research approach. The latter's stress on measurable behavior cannot characterize individuals' subjective experiences and meanings, or offer a methodology to discover them. The qualitative tradition has more potential for making major contributions. Quantitative methods have had few serious policy implications despite dominating educational research for nearly 70 years. Included are 2 figures and 28 references. (MLH)

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# SOCIAL CONTROL AND THE QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH TRADITIONS

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# SOCIAL CONTROL AND THE QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH TRADITIONS

## Introduction

Although the distinction between the qualitative and quantitative traditions of social science research are far from clear, proponents of each have argued the merits of each tradition at least since the 1930's (Glaser & Strauss, 1966), if not since the early 1900's (Bruyn, 1966). Regarding research traditions, Laudan (1977, p. 81) states:

> A research tradition is a set of general assumptions about the entities and processes in a domain of study, and about the appropriate method to be used for investigating problems and constructing the theories in the domain.

The rediscovery, as it were, of qualitative research in education in the 1970's (Fetterman, 1982; Magoon, 1977; Wilson, 1977) has fanned the debate among the proponents of the qualitative and quantitative research traditions in educational research circles. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the implications of research following each tradition have important consequences for those who use educational research to inform policy decisions.

## Educational Research

Educational research, regardless of tradition, has a practical purpose. This is to provide knowledge which is useful in establishing and maintaining experiences which are educating (Ausubel, 1973; Freeman, 1973). Freeman (1973, p.76) notes:

> Educational research must start from, and return to, the practical problem. It must be organized about practical issues. It uses theoretical research, but this theoretical research must be carried on because it contributes to the solution of practical problems.

The establishment and maintenance of these experiences imply a mechanism of social control. At a lower limit, inherent in the meaning of the term education is the notion of controlling another's behavior (Schutz, 1962). And at an upper limit, inherent in the term is the notion of controlling another's actions (Schutz, 1962). Hence, the mechanisms of social control which are implied in educational research are very important to consider.

The purposes of educational research have been and continue to be described in a variety of ways. Explicit or implicit in most descriptions are two purposes. One of these is to develop understanding; the other is to allow for prediction and control. John W. Best, in his book entitled

Research In Education (1981), provides a typical description of the purposes of educational research. He states:

> Research may be defined as the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles or theories, resulting in prediction and possible ultimate control (p. 18, emphasis in original).

Referring to behavioral sciences in general, Fred N. Kerlinger (1973) concurs with Best's statement. Collectively equating the terms exploration, understanding, prediction, and control with the term theory, Kerlinger states:

> A theory is a set of interrelated (concepts), definitions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of exploring and predicting the phenomena (p. 9, emphasis in original).

Kerlinger goes on to say: "[If] we can predict reliably, we can control because control is deducible from prediction (p. 10)."

Within educational research in particular and social science research in general, the qualitative research tradition is oriented toward developing understandings of social phenomena. In speaking about what is "fundamental" in qualitative educational research Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen in their book, Qualitative Research for

Education, An Introduction to Theory and Methods (1982), state:

> It [qualitative research] relies on people's own words, both to understand a social problem and to convince others to help remedy it. And, instead of accepting official, dominant, and commonly accepted understandings like 'schools educate' or 'hospitals cure,' it turns these phrases on end and makes them objects of study (p. 221, emphasis added).

Speaking explicitly about the "job" of theory in sociology and implicitly of the role of theory in social sciences, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm H. Strauss, in their book The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, state: "... theory...is a strategy for handling data in research, providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining (p. 3)." Here Glaser and Strauss use the terms "describing and explaining" to mean understanding. These authors go on at length to argue that the best way to develop social theories is in the qualitative research tradition.

Proponents of the quantitative tradition in educational research in particular and the social sciences in general are not as explicit about the purposes of research as those who align themselves with the qualitative tradition. Kerlinger (1973), as noted above, espouses a broad conception of research in the social sciences; however in

his well known work, he implicitly identifies himself as siding with the quantitative tradition and espousing prediction and control. Virtually all of his book rests on quantitative research methods, and the vast majority of his work is oriented to investigating the validity of predictive relationships in social phenomena. Similarly, George S. Howard (1985), in his book, Basic Research Methods in the Social Sciences, implicitly identifies himself as associated with the quantitative tradition in social science research. With the exception of an 11-page chapter, entitled "Qualitative Methodology," his 250 page volume is devoted to quantitative research methods. In his discussion of the goals of social science research, he notes that the goal is "...an understanding of the mechanisms involved in the operation of the world and all in it (p. 10)." After mentioning understanding as the goal of social science research, he goes on to argue that the best way to test understanding is to make predictions based on understandings and then determine if the predictions were consistent with the understandings. Howard continues:

> Prediction gives a powerful tool. Theoretically, if we can predict the behavior of people and things, we can exert some control over these events and the ways in which we are influenced by them. Predicting and controlling behavior, then, are potential results of understanding (p. 10).

With respect to the arguments made concerning the proponents of the quantitative tradition in the social sciences and their orientation to prediction and control in research, a similar argument can be made for numerous educational researchers. For example, L. R. Gay clearly identifies herself as associated with the quantitative tradition in her book Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application, 2nd Edition (1981). Although she presents a chapter on historical research and several sections which have a qualitative research character, her work carries the message that quantitative educational research is superior to other types. In the opening sentence of her book, she states:

> The goal of all scientific endeavors is to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena. This goal is based on the assumption that all behaviors and events are orderly and that they are effects which have discoverable causes (p.5).

At another point in her book Gay goes on to indicate that experimental research--clearly a quantitative method--is the ultimate research method because only through it can an authentic understanding of prediction and control be gained.

Certainly all research in the qualitative tradition is not oriented to developing an understanding of social phenomena, and all research in the quantitative tradition is not oriented to producing knowledge which is useful for

predicting and controlling social phenomena. However, in general it can be said that proponents of the qualitative research tradition view the purposes of educational research as being to describe, understand and explain. Whereas, the proponents of the quantitative research tradition view the purposes of educational research as being able to predict and control.

## Social Control

As discussed above, the establishment and maintenance of experiences which are educating imply mechanisms of social control. In terms of a leader and followers, a superordinate and subordinates, a teacher and students, or among individuals, Mitchell and Spady individually and collectively (Spady & Mitchell, 1977a; Mitchell & Spady, 1977; Spady & Mitchell, 1976; Mitchell, 1974; Spady, 1974) argue that social control can be analytically separated into two components. These are social control employing authority relationships and social control employing power relationships. For purposes of the present discussion, relevant aspects of the theory of social control developed by Mitchell and Spady will be summarized.

Authority involves one individual getting another to voluntarily hold and personally fulfill desired role and goal expectations. Power involves one individual getting

another to voluntarily or involuntarily display certain behaviors.

Authority involves establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships which have an authentic and substantive character. These relationships are intrinsically fulfilling to all individuals involved. Arising out of the authentic and substantive relationships are symbols, both tangible and intangible, which are extrinsic to the relationships. The symbols, when separated from authority relationships, become power resources. Social control associated with power arises when one individual manipulates these resources with the intent of controlling the behavior of others.

Power resources can be viewed by individuals as either rewarding or punishing. When the former are employed, voluntary behavior results; when the latter is employed, involuntary yet compliant behavior of individuals ensues. In order to avoid fear and anxiety associated with punishments, behavior of individuals conforms to another's desires. It is important to underscore the notion that control associated with power can voluntarily and involuntarily manipulate the behavior of others; whereas, only control associated with authority can get individuals to voluntarily hold and fulfill desired role and goal expectations.

Authority relationships among individuals can be analytically separated into four independent modes. These

include charismatic, traditional, legal, and expert. Individuals experience intimacy under another individual's charismatic authority and worthiness under traditional authority. Under legal authority, individuals experience security and experience adequacy under expert authority. The authority modes, the relationships among them, and their impact on individuals are presented in Figure 1.

Similar to authority relationships between an individual and others, power relationships can be analytically separated into four corresponding independent modes. These include psychological, moral, contractual, and technical. Associated with each of these modes are rewarding and punishing resources. Individuals experience acceptance when another individual employs rewarding psychological resources and rejection when punishing psychological resources are used. Honor is experienced by individuals when another individual uses rewarding moral resources and shame when punishing moral resources are employed. Rewarding contractual resources used by an individual produce the experience of autonomy in individuals, and punishing contractual resources produce a sense of coercion in individuals. The use of rewarding technical resources by an individual leads to a sense of potency on the part of others; where as, the use of punishing technical resources produces a feeling of manipulation. The power modes, the relationships among

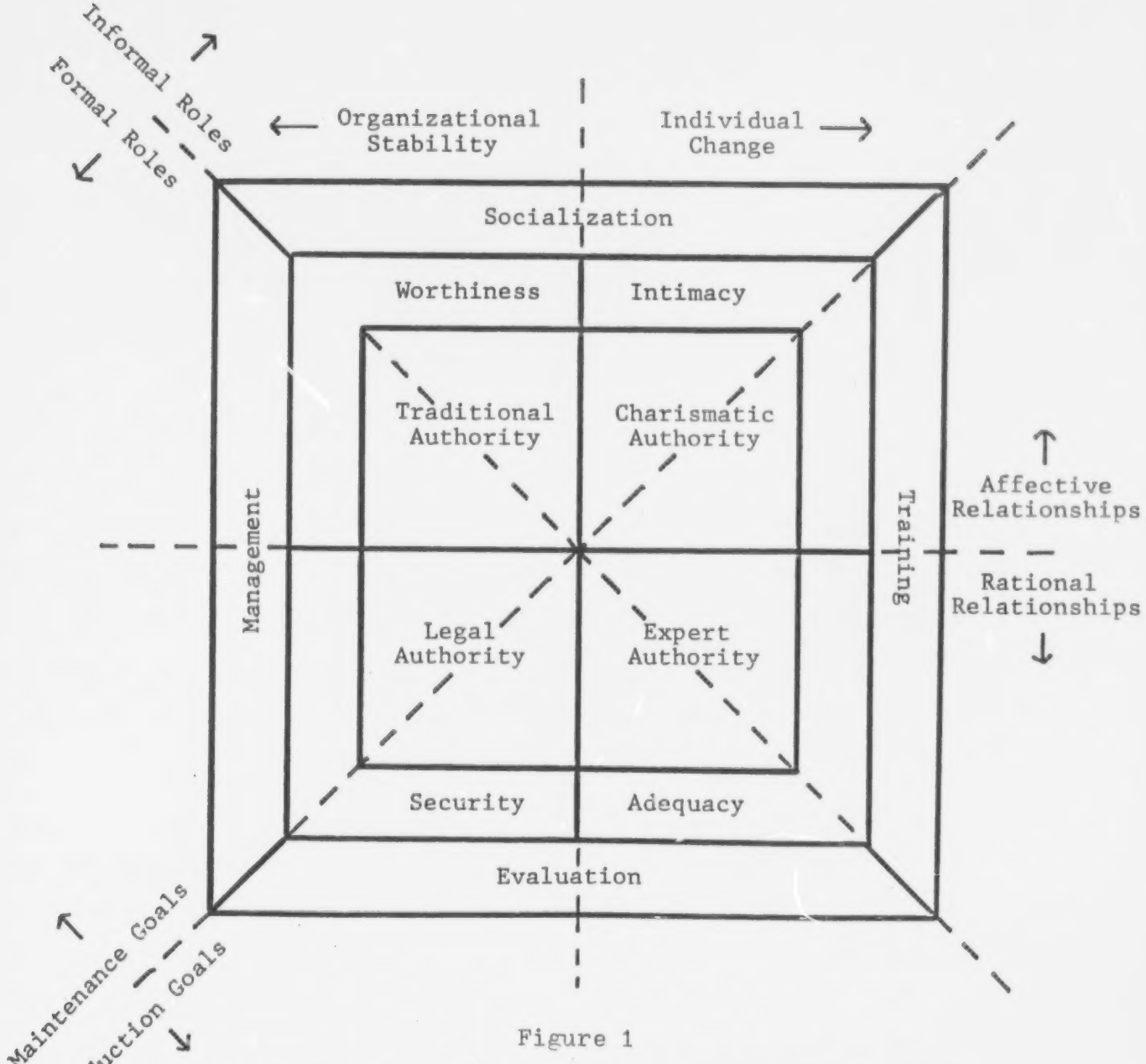


Figure 1

Authority Modes, the Relationships Among Authority Modes, the Experiences of Individuals Under Authority Modes, the Functional Structures Associated with Authority Modes, and the Orientations Associated with Authority Modes.

Adapted from a fignure in Spady & Mitchell, 1977a.

them, and their impact on individuals are presented in Figure 2.

Elaboration of the relationship between the social control mechanisms of authority and power and among their respective modes is detailed in the work of Mitchell and Spady and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that they assert that authority is the fundamental basis of social control. Furthermore, they assert that authority based relationships are the only type of authentically connecting interpersonal relationships and are the only type of relationships which holds the possibility of individual or mutual transformation of personal actions including intentions, beliefs, and behaviors. The term possible is used here because authority relationships in the final analysis are voluntary on the part of all participants in social interactions. Hence, authority based relationships always have an element of uncertainty. In Mitchell and Spady's terms, power is a secondary basis of social control because it arises out of authority. These theorists suggest that power resources can predictably control the behavior of individuals yet will never control personal actions.

## Social Control and the Research Traditions

The qualitative research tradition is oriented to developing a deep and substantial understanding of social phenomena. Included in this understanding are the

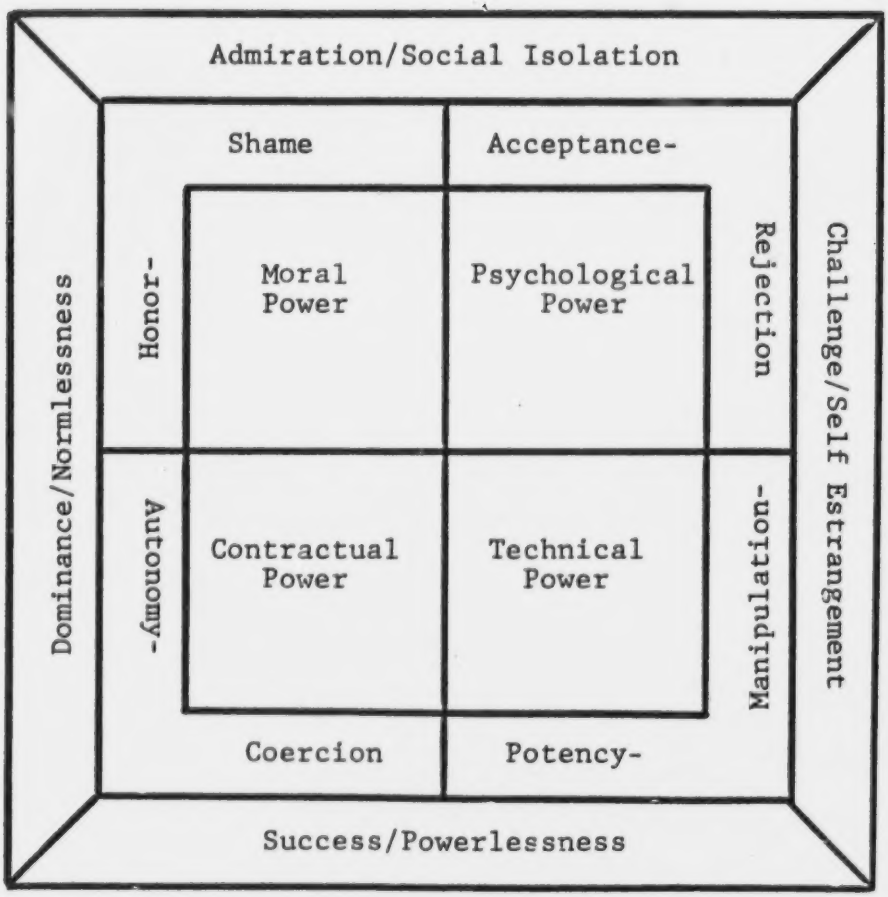


Figure 2

Power Modes, the Relationships Among Power Modes, the Experiences of Individuals Under Power Modes, and the Structures Associated with Power Modes.

Adapted from a figure in Spady & Mitchell, 1977a.

subjective experiences of participants in social situations and an understanding of these experiences in terms of relevant contextual factors. In order to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences of participants, trust must develop between the researcher and participants. Through these trusting relationships, researchers gain insight concerning how participants manage their public images (Goffman, 1959), front out researchers (Douglas, 1976), and otherwise separate their intentions from their behavior. Investigators in the qualitative tradition quickly come to the conclusion that meanings participants give to social situations are not particularly self-evident, uniform, or amenable to change and are related to the social context. However, participant's behavior in social settings, at least temporarily, can be effectively managed by participants to give others, including researchers, the impression that the participants attach a particular meaning to a social situation. Hence, a conclusion of research in the qualitative tradition is that individual behavior can be relatively easily managed given the appropriate resources; however, the beliefs and roles which stand behind and form the foundation of the meanings participants give and experience in social situations cannot be directly controlled.

The quantitative research tradition is oriented to developing a knowledge of prediction and control of social phenomena. Phenomena which typically are not conceptualized

in these terms are not included in research endeavors. The phenomena which are included are reliably measured characteristics of one sort or another. These include a variety of contextual factors and the relationship of these to both behaviors of individuals and other characteristics which are inferred. Hence, a conclusion of research in the quantitative tradition is that individual behavior and other characteristics follow predictable patterns and are amenable to direct control.

Employing the notions of authority and power as articulated by Mitchell and Spady, it seems reasonable to conclude that, at least implicitly, researchers in the qualitative tradition approach social phenomena from an authority perspective and arrive at conclusions which imply authority relationships among individuals in social situations. In contrast, it seem reasonable to conclude that researchers in the quantitative tradition implicitly take a power orientation toward subjects in their studies and their conclusions are based on power notions of social control.

There is fair, yet not complete, agreement that schools are human transforming institutions. With respect to elementary and secondary schools, Bidwell (1965, p. 973) states:

> ...the central goal of any school system is to prepare its students for adult status, by training them in the knowledge and skills, and indoctrinating

them in the moral orientations, which adult roles require.

In other words, Bidwell considers the goal of schools to transform children into adults who hold and fulfill culturally accepted role and goal expectations.

The structure of classrooms, schools, and districts in which the transformation of children into adults takes place has recently been vigorously debated. Educational organizations, once considered bureaucratically or tightly linked structures, on closer inspection have a structural looseness (Bidwell, 1965) and can be considered to have loosely coupled structures (Weick, 1976; Weick; 1982; Herriott & Firestone, 1984; Firestone, 1986; Weick, 1986). Although there has been considerable discussion regarding the loosely coupled character of schools, the precise nature of the coupling and the conditions which give rise to the loosely coupled character of schools have eluded theorists (Firestone, 1986).

A response to the question of the conditions which give rise to the loosely coupled character of classrooms, schools, and districts is the following. Schools are human transformational organizations; human transformation must rest on social control through authority based relationships; the consequences of social control based on authority always have a degree of uncertainty; it is the uncertainty in social control through authority that stands at least as

one important condition of all educational organizations that gives them their loosely coupled character.

It is unlikely that the precise structure and process associated with educational organizations can be understood through the quantitative research tradition. This tradition does not allow for the discovery of the subtle characteristics of educational organizations for several reasons. First, because its emphasis is on measureable behavior, research in the quantitative tradition does not allow for the characterization of the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals. And secondly, it does not sustain a methodology which will allow for discovery of these subjective experiences and meanings. Since the qualitative research tradition at least implicitly is based on investigating power relationships, theoretical works as well as research in this tradition will not be able to characterize and describe the character of schools which is currently referred to as loosely coupled.

Conversely, it is likely that the nature of the subtle interpersonal process associated with educational organizations in general, and elementary and secondary schools in particular, will be able to be characterized through the qualitative research tradition. Since this tradition at least implicitly rests on investigating authority based interpersonal relationship in which subjective experiences and meanings are central, theoretical works as well as empirical research have the opportunity of discovering and

characterizing the genuine nature of the interpersonal process associated with classrooms, schools, and districts. Coupled with current developments in video recording and computer hard- and software, the qualitative research tradition has the possibility of making major contributions.

## Policy Implications of the Research Traditions

Without question, the quantitative research tradition has dominated educational research for nearly seventy years. It must be acknowledged with some embarrassment that research which has come from this tradition has had few serious policy implications. The schism between theory and practice is paramount. This schism, we argue, is largely due to the power orientation associated with the quantitative research tradition. Since schools by definition are human transformational organizations, and human transformation rests on authority based interpersonal relationships, policies at any level which are informed by the quantitative research tradition will not prove very useful. In contrast, we predict that understandings about schools and their processes which come from the qualitative tradition will prove to be useful. Since the qualitative research tradition largely rests on authority based relationships for its data collection, analysis, and policy recommendations, we feel certain that this tradition will

provide our much needed knowledge of classrooms, schools, and school districts.

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